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ETHIOPIA

SUCCESS STORY

Coffee Growers Link to New Markets

Farmers export higher quality specialty beans and fetch better prices



Photo: Fintrac Inc/Christof Krackhardt

Women sort coffee beans at a USAID-assisted processing facility in Ethiopia. USAID is working with local farmers to increase specialty coffee production and sales.

“Before, I only knew coffee in the cup. Now I know exactly how many hands the coffee has to go through to get there,” said Asnakech Thomas, an Ethiopian coffee farmer.

Telling Our Story
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Growing up on a coffee plantation, Asnakech Thomas is proud that her family comes from a coffee-rich region in Ethiopia’s Southern Nations, Nationalities and People’s Region. She is also proud that, in February 2007, her coffee was ranked highest in a pre-selection process for Ethiopia’s first-ever private coffee auction. This enabled her to sell the coffee for \$2 per pound, a 50 percent increase from before the auction.

Asnakech is participating in a USAID program focused on improving specialty coffee production and quality in Ethiopia. The program helped Asnakech install and operate an eco-friendly coffee processing machine. The project also provided her with expertise on how to create specialty coffee throughout the production process — from tree care, to picking and drying techniques. At the same time, USAID worked with the coffee chains to organize a coffee auction. The auction connected Ethiopian farmers with buyers from more than 40 countries. Some of these specialty coffees sold for as much as \$5 per pound, 280 percent more than typical prices.

As Asnakech finished processing coffee for the season, samples of coffee from her and 20 other growers with the program were shipped around the world for buyers to taste and grade. The auction gave producers like Asnakech an opportunity to reach new markets and showcase their specialty coffees. The samples sold at the auction were small and select, and enabled buyers and producers to connect and make long-term trade commitments. After USAID assistance from seed to sales, Asnakech’s samples were bought by an exporter and she made connections with other buyers for future sales.

Asnakech knows she stands out in the coffee industry as a woman, but being the only woman coffee producer and exporter makes her want to work harder. She explained that at first, the farmers who brought their coffee berries (the fruit that contains the coffee beans) to her mill could not believe a woman was in charge. “Now they are used to it. It’s good — almost 80 percent of the people who pick my coffee are women. I want to encourage them,” she said.

As for her coffee placing highest, Asnakech says that it was good, but not good enough. “I received a score of 95. Next time, I want 100.”